Open Access publishing in physics gains momentum

The first meeting of European particle physics funding agencies took place today at CERN to establish a consortium for Open Access publishing in particle physics, SCOAP3. This is the first time an entire scientific field is exploring the conversion of its reader-paid journals into an author-paid Open Access format.

Open Access is a policy that could revolutionize the academic publishing world and have a great impact on research. By changing the traditional model of financing publications through reader subscriptions, the publications will be free to readers and financed by funding agencies via laboratories and the authors. This new concept in publishing will broaden opportunities for researchers and funding agencies in achieving greater benefit from unrestricted distribution of the results of their publicly funded research.

"DESY fully supports open access publishing in particle physics and we would like to see it realized within a short time scale. It is of great importance that we are actively and constructively involved in these ongoing discussions aiming to establish a sponsoring consortium," stated Rolf-Dieter Heuer, Research Director at Germany's DESY laboratory. His remarks were echoed by Francois le Diberder, from the French national institute for particle and nuclear physics (CNRS/IN2P3): "CNRS, and IN2P3, fully support the SCOAP initiative and will proactively participate in its inception and operation". The delegate from Italy's national institute for nuclear physics (INFN) Graziano Fortuna, said, "INFN fully supports the move to an Open Access system for high energy physics publications."

Expressions of support came from other delegates, including those of German funding agencies, notably the Max Planck Society, Greece, Portugal, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The European Committee for Future Accelerators (ECFA) also offered support. Both national and international library consortia were enthusiastic about the initiative.

"There is a wind of change blowing and with it the possibility to experiment with new models – in this CERN is perceived as the pioneer of a new publishing paradigm and the SCOAP initiative as a pilot project for future developments in scientific publishing," said Peteris Zilgalvis of the European Commission.

Publishers also are aligning with the opportunities offered by Open Access: Journals published by American Institute of Physics, American Physical Society, Elsevier and Springer have already started to offer authors the possibility to make their articles freely available to readers. Shortly before the meeting, the publishing consortium of the European Physical Journal lowered the price tag for such an
Open Access option and announced an author-friendly approach to copyright. At the same time the publishers of the Journal of High Energy Physics (JHEP) stated they are ready to embrace a sponsorship policy in which they would allow unrestricted access to their articles. On the cost of this policy JHEP states: "we have managed to prove that the costs can be reduced whilst at the same time ensuring the highest rigour in peer review".

Today the first steps have been taken in developing an effective strategy to provide funding to Open Access publishing in high energy physics. An interim working party comprising physicists, librarians and legal experts from across Europe has been formed with the mandate to lay the foundations for SCOAP3 within the next few months.

Fred Friend, Honorary Director of Scholarly Communication, University College London, stated, "Today, the lead has come from funding agencies. It is important to have a united front to achieve the ultimate goals of Open Access and change the High Energy Physics publishing landscape for ever".

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